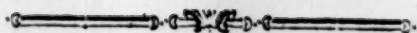


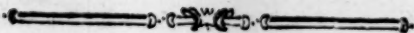
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NARRATIVE,

Ec. Ec. Ec.



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A
NARRATIVE
OF THE
DISINTERMENT
OF
MILTON'S COFFIN,
IN THE
PARISH-CHURCH of ST. GILES, CRIPPLEGATE,
On WEDNESDAY, 4th of AUGUST, 1790;
AND OF
THE TREATMENT OF THE CORPSE,
DURING THAT AND THE FOLLOWING DAY.

*—nec mortuis parcunt. quin illos de requie sepulturæ. de asylo
quodam mortis, jam alios, jam nec totos avellant, dissecant,
disfrabant.*

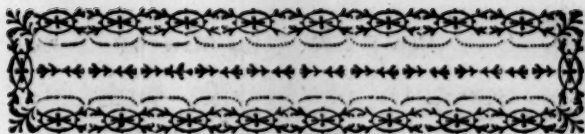
TERTULL. Apologet. Cap. 37.

L O N D O N :

Printed for T. and J. EGERTON, *Whitehall.*

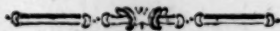
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A

NARRATIVE, &c.



HAVING read in the Public Advertiser, on Saturday, the 7th of August, 1790, that *Milton's* coffin had been dug up, in the parish church of *St. Giles*, Cripplegate, and was there to be seen, I went immediately to the church, and found the latter part of the information untrue; but, from conversations on that day,

day, on Monday the 9th, and on Tuesday, the 10th of August, with Mr. Thomas *Strong*, Solicitor and F. A. S. Red-cross-street, *Vestry-Clerk*; Mr. John *Cole*, Barbican, Silversmith, *Churchwarden*; Mr. John *Laming*, Barbican, Pawnbroker, and Mr. *Fountain*, Beech-lane, Publican, *Overseers*; Mr. *Taylor*, of Stanton, Derbyshire, Surgeon; a friend of Mr. *Laming*, and a visitor in his house; Mr. William *Ascough*, Coffin-maker, Fore-street, *Parish-clerk*; Benjamin *Holmes* and Thomas *Hawkefworth*, journeymen to Mr. *Ascough*; Mrs. *Hoppey*, Fore-street, *Sexton*; Mr. *Ellis*, No. 9, Lamb's-chapel, comedian of the royalty-theatre; and John *Poole* (son of Rowland Poole) watch-spring-maker, Jacob's-

cob's-passage, Barbican; the following facts are established.

It being in the contemplation of some persons to bestow a considerable sum of money, in erecting a monument, in the parish church of *St. Giles*, Cripplegate, to the memory of *Milton*, and the particular spot of his interment, in that church, having for many years past, been ascertained only by tradition, several of the principal parishioners have, at their meetings, frequently expressed a wish, that his coffin should be dug-for, that incontestable evidence of its exact situation might be established, before the said monument should be erected. The entry, among the burials, in the register-

gister-book, 12th of November, 1674, is “ *John Milton*, Gentleman, consumption, *chancell.*” The church of *St. Giles*, Cripplegate, was built in 1030; was burnt down (except the steeple) and rebuilt in 1545; was repaired in 1682; and again in 1710. In the repair of 1682, an alteration took place in the disposition of the inside of the church; the pulpit was removed from the second pillar, against which it stood, north of the chancel, to the south side of the present chancel, which was then formed, and pews were built over the old chancel. The tradition has always been, that *Milton* was buried in the chancel, under the clerk’s desk; but, the circumstance of the alteration in the church not having of late years

years been attended to, the clerk, sexton, and other officers of the parish have misguided enquirers, by shewing the spot under the clerk's desk, in the present chancel, as the place of *Milton's* interment. I have twice, at different periods, been shewn that spot, as the place where *Milton* lay. Even Mr. *Baskerville*, who died a few years ago, and who had requested in his will to be buried by *Milton*, was deposited in the above-mentioned spot of the present chancel, in pious intention of compliance with his request. The church is now, August, 1790, under a general repair, by contract, for 1350*l.* and Mr. *Strong*, Mr. *Cole*, and other parishioners, having very prudently judged that the search would be made with

B

much

much less inconvenience to the parish at this time, when the church is under repair, than at any period after the said repair should be completed, Mr. *Cole*, in the last days of July, ordered the workmen to dig in search of the coffin. Mr. *Ascough*, his father, and grand-father, have been parish-clerks of *St. Giles* for upwards of 90 years past. His grand-father, who died in February, 1759-60, aged 84, used frequently to say, that *Milton* had been buried under the clerk's desk in the chancel. John *Poole*, aged 70, has often heard his father talk of *Milton's* person, from those who had seen him; and also, that he lay under the common-council-men's pew. The common-council-men's pew is built over that
 very

very part of the old chancel, where the former clerk's-desk stood. These traditions in the parish, reported to Mr. *Strong* and Mr. *Cole*, readily directed them to dig from the present chancel, northwards, towards the pillar, against which the former pulpit and desk had stood. On Tuesday afternoon, August 3d, notice was brought to Messrs. *Strong* and *Cole*, that the coffin was discovered. They went immediately to the church; and, by help of a candle, proceeded under the common-council-men's pew, to the place where the coffin lay. It was in a chalky soil, and directly over a wooden coffin, supposed to be that of *Milton's* father; tradition having always reported, that *Milton* was

buried next to his father. The registry of the father of *Milton*, among the burials, in the parish-book, is “ *John Melton,*
“ Gentleman, 15th of March, 1646-7.” In digging through the whole space, from the present chancel, where the ground was opened, to the situation of the former clerk’s-desk, there was not found any other coffin, which could raise the smallest doubt of this being *Milton’s*. The two oldest, found in the ground, had inscriptions, which *Mr. Strong* copied; they were of as late dates as 1727 and 1739. When he and *Mr. Cole* had examined the coffin, they ordered water and a brush to be brought, that they might wash it, in search of an inscription, or initials, or date; but, upon its
being

being carefully cleansed, none was found. The following particulars were given to me in writing, by Mr. *Strong*, and they contain the admeasurement of the coffin, as taken by him, with a rule. “ A
 “ leaden coffin, found under the com-
 “ mon-council-men’s pew, on the north
 “ side of the chancel, nearly under the
 “ place, where the old pulpit and
 “ clerk’s-desk stood. The coffin ap-
 “ peared to be old, much corroded, and
 “ without any inscription, or plate upon
 “ it. It was in length five feet ten in-
 “ ches, and in width, at the broadest
 “ part, over the shoulders, one foot four
 “ inches.” Conjecture naturally pointed
 out, both to Mr. *Strong* and Mr. *Cole*,
 that, by moving the leaden coffin, there
 would

would be a great chance of finding some inscription on the wooden one underneath; but, with a just and laudable piety, they disdained to disturb the sacred ashes, after a requiem of 116 years; and having, as far as might be, satisfied their curiosity, and ascertained the fact, which was the subject of it, Mr. *Cole* ordered the ground to be closed. This was on the afternoon of Tuesday, August the 3d; and, when I waited on Mr. *Strong*, on Saturday morning, the 7th, he informed me, that the coffin had been found on the Tuesday, had been examined, washed, and measured by him and Mr. *Cole*; but that the ground had been immediately closed, when they left the church:—not doubting that Mr.

Cole's

Cole's order had been punctually obeyed. But the direct contrary appears to have been the fact.

On Tuesday evening, the 3d, Mr. *Cole*, Messrs. *Laming* and *Taylor*, *Holmes*, &c. had a *merry-meeting*, as Mr. *Cole* expresses himself, at *Fountain's* house: the conversation there turned upon *Milton's* coffin having been discovered; and, in the course of the evening, several of those present expressing a desire to see it, Mr. *Cole* assented, that if the ground was not already closed, the closing of it should be deferred, until they should have satisfied their curiosity. Between 8 and 9 o'clock, on Wednesday morning, the 4th, the two overseers, (*Laming* and *Fountain*)
and

and Mr. *Taylor*, went to the house of *Ascough*, the clerk, which leads into the church-yard, and asked for *Holmes* ; they then went with *Holmes* into the church, and pulled the coffin, which lay deep in the ground, from its original station, to the edge of the excavation, into day-light. Mr. *Laming* told me, that, to assist in thus removing it, he put his hand into a corroded hole, which he saw in the lead, at the coffin foot. When they had thus removed it, the overseers asked *Holmes* if he could open it, that they might see the body. *Holmes* immediately fetched a mallet and a chisel, and cut open the top of the coffin, slantwise from the head, as low as the breast ; so that, the top being doubled backward, they could see the
corpse ;

corpse : he cut it open also at the foot. Upon first view of the body, it appeared perfect, and completely enveloped in the shroud, which was of many folds ; the ribs standing-up regularly. When they disturbed the shroud, the ribs fell. Mr. *Fountain* told me, that he pulled hard at the teeth, which resisted, until some one hit them a knock with a stone, when they easily came out. There were but five in the upper-jaw, which were all perfectly sound and white, and all taken by Mr. *Fountain* : he gave one of them to Mr. *Laming* : Mr. *Laming* also took one from the lower-jaw ; and Mr. *Taylor* took two from it. Mr. *Laming* told me, that he had at one time a mind to bring away the whole under-jaw with the

C

teeth

teeth in it ; he had it in his hand, but tossed it back again. Also, that he lifted up the head, and saw a great quantity of hair, which lay strait and even, behind the head, and in the state of hair, which had been combed and tied-together before interment : but it was wet ; the coffin having considerable corroded holes, both at the head and foot, and a great part of the water, with which it had been washed, on the Tuesday afternoon, having run into it. The Overseers and Mr. *Taylor* went away soon afterwards ; and Messrs. *Laming* and *Taylor* went home to get scissors to cut-off some of the hair : they returned about ten ; when Mr. *Laming* poked his stick against the head, and brought

brought some of the hair over the forehead; but, as they saw the scissors were not necessary, Mr. *Taylor* took up the hair, as it laid on the forehead, and carried it home. The water, which had got into the coffin, on the Tuesday afternoon, had made a fludge at the bottom of it, emitting a nauseous smell, and which occasioned Mr. *Laming* to use his stick to procure the hair, and not to lift up the head a second time. Mr. *Laming* also took out one of the leg bones, but threw it in again. *Holmes* went out of the church, whilst Messrs. *Laming*, *Taylor*, and *Fountain* were there the first time, and he returned when the two former were come the second time. When Messrs. *Laming* and *Taylor* had

finally quitted the church, the coffin was removed, from the edge of the excavation, back to its original station ; but was no otherwise closed, than by the lid, where it had been cut and reversed, being bent down again. Mr. *Ascough*, the clerk, was from home the greater part of that day ; and Mrs. *Hoppey*, the sexton, was from home the whole day. Elizabeth *Grant*, the grave-digger, and who is servant to Mrs. *Hoppey*, therefore now took possession of the coffin ; and, as its situation, under the common-council-men's pew, would not admit of its being seen without the help of a candle, she kept a tinder-box in the excavation, and, when any persons came, struck a light, and conducted them under the
pew ;

pew ; where, by reverſing the part of the lid which had been cut, ſhe exhibited the body, at firſt for 6d. and afterwards for 3d. and 2d. each perſon. The workmen in the church kept the doors locked to all thoſe who would not pay the price of a pot of beer for entrance, and many, to avoid that payment, got in at a window at the weſt end of the church, near to Mr. *Aſcough's* counting-houſe.

I went on Saturday, the 7th, to Mr. *Laming's* houſe, to requeſt a lock of the hair ; but, not meeting with Mr. *Taylor* at home, went again on Monday the 9th, when Mr. *Taylor* gave me part of what hair he had reſerved for himſelf.

Hawkeſworth

Hawkefworth having informed me, on the Saturday, that Mr. *Ellis*, the player, had taken some hair, and that he had seen him take a rib-bone, and carry it away in paper under his coat, I went from Mr. *Laming's*, on Monday, to Mr. *Ellis*, who told me, that he had paid 6d. to Elizabeth *Grant* for seeing the body; and that he had lifted up the head, and taken, from among the fludge under it, a small quantity of hair, with which was a piece of the shroud, and, adhering to the hair, a bit of the skin of the skull, of about the size of a shilling. He put them all into my hands, with the rib-bone, which appeared to be one of the upper ribs. The piece of the shroud was of coarse linen. The hair, which

which he had taken, was short : a small part of it he had washed, and the remainder was in the clotted state, in which he had taken it. He told me, that he had tried to reach down as low as the hands of the corpse, but had not been able to effect it. The washed hair corresponded exactly with that in my possession, and which I had just received from Mr. *Taylor*. *Ellis* is a very ingenious worker-in-hair, and he said, that thinking it would be of great advantage to him to possess a quantity of *Milton's* hair, he had returned to the church on Thursday, and had made his endeavors to get access a second time to the body; but had been refused admittance. *Hawkefworth* took a tooth, and broke off
a bit

a bit of the coffin ; of which I was informed by Mr. *Ascough*. I purchased them both of *Hawkesworth*, on Saturday the 7th, for 2s. ; and he told me, that when he took the tooth out, there were but two more remaining ; one of which was afterwards taken by another of Mr. *Ascough's* men ; and Ellis informed me, that, at the time when he was there, on Wednesday, the teeth were all gone ; but the Overseers say, they think that all the teeth were not taken out of the coffin, though displaced from the jaws, but that some of them must have fallen among the other bones, as they very readily came out, after the first were drawn. — Haslib, son of William Haslib, of Jewin-street, undertaker,
took

took one of the small bones, which I purchased of him, on Monday, the 9th, for 2s.

With respect to the identity of the person; any one must be a skeptic against violent presumptions, to entertain a doubt of its being that of *Milton*. The parish-traditions of the spot; the age of the coffin; none other found in the ground, which can at all contest with it, or render it suspicious; *Poole's* tradition, that those, who had conversed with his father about *Milton's* person, always described him to have been thin, with long hair; the entry in the register-book, that *Milton* died of a consumption, are all strong confirmations, with the size of the

D

coffin,

coffin, of the identity of the person. If it be objected, that against the pillar, where the pulpit formerly stood, and immediately over the common-council-men's pew, is a monument to the family of *Smith*, which shews that “ *near that place*” were buried, in 1653, *Richard* Smith, aged 17; in 1655, *John* Smith, aged 32; in 1664, *Elizabeth* Smith, the mother, aged 64; and, in 1675, *Richard* Smith, the father, aged 85; it may be answered, that if the coffin in question be one of these, the others should be there also. The corpse is certainly not that of a man of 85: and, if it be supposed one of the first-named males of the *Smith*-family, certainly the two later coffins should appear; but none such are found; nor could

could that monument have been erected until many years after the death of the last person mentioned in the inscription ; and it was then placed there, as it expresses, not by any of the family, but at the expence of friends. The flatness of the pillar, after the pulpit had been removed, offered an advantageous situation for it ; and “ *near this place,*” upon a mural monument, will always admit of liberal construction. *Holmes*, who is much respected in that parish, and very ingenious and intelligent in his business, says, that a leaden coffin, when the inner wooden case is perished, must, from pressure and its own weight, shrink in breadth, and that, therefore, more than the present admeasurement of this coffin,

across the shoulders, must have been its original breadth. There is evidence, also, that it was incurvated, both on the top and at the sides, at the time when it was discovered. But the strongest of all confirmations is the hair, both in its length and color. Behold *Faithorne's* quarto-print of *Milton*, taken ad vivum, in 1670, four years before *Milton's* death. Observe the short locks growing towards the forehead, and the long ones flowing from the same place down the sides of the face. The whole quantity of hair, which Mr. *Taylor* took, was from the forehead, and all taken at one grasp. I measured, on Monday morning, the 9th, that lock of it, which he had given to Mr. *Laming*, six inches and an half by a rule;

rule; and the lock of it, which he gave to me, taken at the same time and from the same place, measures only two inches and an half. In the reign of *Charles II.* how few, besides *Milton*, wore their hair! *Wood* says, *Milton* had light brown hair; the very description of that which we possess: and what may seem extraordinary, it is yet so strong, that Mr. *Laming*, to cleanse it from its clotted state, let the cistern-cock run on it, for near a minute, and then rubbed it between his fingers, without injury.

Milton's coffin lay open from Wednesday morning, the 4th, at 9 o'clock, until 4 o'clock in the afternoon of the following day, when the ground was closed.

With

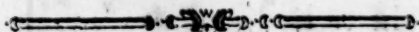
With respect to there being no inscription on the coffin ; *Holmes* says, that inscription-plates were not used, nor invented, at the time when *Milton* was buried ; that the practice then was to paint the inscription on the outside wooden coffin ; which, in this case, was entirely perished.

It has never been pretended that any hair was taken, except by Mr. *Taylor*, and by *Ellis*, the player ; and all which the latter took would, when cleansed, easily lie in a small locket. Mr. *Taylor* has divided his share into many small parcels ; and the lock, which I saw in Mr. *Laming*'s hands, on Saturday morning, the 7th, and which then measured 6 inches

inches and an half, had been so cut and reduced by divisions among Mr. *Laming's* friends, at noon, on Monday, the 9th, that he then possessed only a small bit, from two to three inches in length.

All the teeth are remarkably short below the gum. The five, which were in the upper-jaw, and the middle teeth of the lower, are perfect and white. Mr. *Fountain* took the five upper-jaw teeth ; Mr. *Laming* one from the lower-jaw ; Mr. *Taylor* two from it ; *Hawkefworth* one ; and another of Mr. *Ascougb's* men one : besides these, I have not been able to trace any ; nor have I heard that any more were taken. It is not probable that more than ten should have been brought

brought away, if the conjecture of the Overseers, that some dropped among the other bones, be founded.



In recording a transaction, which will strike every liberal mind with horror and disgust, I cannot omit to declare, that I have procured those relics, which I possess, only in hope of bearing part in a pious and honorable restitution of all that has been taken:—the sole atonement, which can now be made, to the violated

violated rights of the dead ; to the insulted parishioners at large ; and to the feelings of all good men. During the present repair of the church, the mode is obvious and easy. Unless that be done, in vain will the parish hereafter boast a sumptuous monument to the memory of *Milton*: it will but display their shame in proportion to its magnificence.

I collected this account from the mouths of those, who were immediate actors in this most sacrilegious scene ; and before the voice of charity had reproached them with their impiety. By it, those are exculpated, whose just and liberal sentiments restrained their hands from an act of violation ; and the blood

E

of

(34)

of the lamb is dashed against the door-
posts of the perpetrators, not to save, but
to mark them to posterity.

PHILIP NEVE.

Furnival's Inn,
14th of August, 1790.



F I N I S.